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TWO INDICTED FOR CULTIVATING OVER 17,000 MARIJUANA PLANTS IN SEQUOIA

FRESNO--United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced today that a federal grand jury sitting in Fresno returned an indictment against SALVADOR PINEDA-PENALOZA, 27, and AUGUSTIN GUTIERREZ MARTINEZ, 19, both of Mexico, charging them with conspiring to manufacture, to distribute, and to possess with the intent to distribute marijuana, manufacturing marijuana, and possessing marijuana with the intent to distribute.

This case was investigated by park rangers of the National Park Service.

According to a criminal complaint previously filed in the case, the defendants were arrested on May 6, 2007, in connection with their involvement in a large-scale marijuana cultivation operation in the Elk Creek area of Sequoia National Park. In fact, approximately 17,334 marijuana plants and 800 seedlings were seized by National Park Service park rangers from the cultivation sites. This seizure represents the largest seizure of marijuana plants from Sequoia National Park in connection with an indicted case. It also constitutes one of the largest in the history of the National Park Service nationwide.

According to United States Attorney Scott, "Large-scale marijuana production on public lands is a rapid growth industry which threatens precious natural resources. Last year, more than 1.1 million marijuana plants were eradicated from public lands in California alone, with an estimated street value of \$4.5 billion."

According to Assistant United States Attorney Karen A. Escobar, who prosecuted the case, if convicted, the defendants face a minimum prison sentence of ten years, a maximum term of life, and a fine of \$4,000,000 per count. They are scheduled to appear on May 18, 2007, before a United States Magistrate Judge for arraignment and plea on the indictment.

The charges are only allegations and the defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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